

## The image lost—brokenness and deceit, Part 1.

We know that when sin entered the world, it had a devastating impact on our relationship with God. However, too often we have thought the effects of the Fall apply only to our relationship with God.

Here we must be sure to continue our commitment to think theologically and holistically as we consider the effects of the Fall on all four levels.

- In the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, our relationship with God was fatally disrupted. Sin caused separation from God that could be overcome only by the blood of Christ.

The God known in intimacy and fellowship in Eden became the holy and terrible God who was approachable only through ritual sacrifice, human mediation and a constant need for a repentant heart that seeks unmerited forgiveness. Far from walking with God in the cool of the evening, the first couple now found only fear and trembling in God's presence. God is often characterized between Eden and Bethlehem (Creation and the advent of the Savior) as a consuming fire, rushing wind, thunder, earthquake and blinding light. The once-intimate relationship between Creator and creature was all but destroyed, being held together only by the unending grace of the God of the covenant.

- We also experienced the **loss of relationship with our self.** Adam and Eve lost their primary purpose in life which was tending the garden, loving one another and fellowshiping freely with God as his beloved

creation. We can see how, since the Fall, the central theme of the history of humanity became our search to get back what was lost, to find God again and be at peace with creation and our Creator.

We are all on a search to recapture intimacy with God and certainty of purpose and meaning in life. The impact of this loss cannot be overstated. When we lose this guiding sense of purpose, we are like untied boats left to float through life seeking other places where we can find security and refuge. Yet every other port disappoints us. Every place we look for validation of our own self-worth ultimately fails us, whether our occupation, friends, family, wealth, fame or even religion.

We also can use our position of leadership as a way for finding this meaning. Regardless of how we try, each method will feed back to us a distorted and conflicted image, leaving us once again afloat on a sea of relativity when we so desperately seek a sense of certainty. It is a despairing place to be.

This self-deception makes every act of sin, in the end, a sin against our self. To sin is to keep the lie going that we are still slaves to sin, that evil still holds power over us, that we have not been “bought with a price,” that we are still under the penalty of sin and death. When we sin, we attempt to undo—and thereby deny—the person we truly are in Christ (Redeemed Image bearers). We become a stranger to our self. This is the root of the problem of the loss of our self in our sinfulness and fall. Yet it is all we have outside a trusting and grateful relationship with our Creator.

To understand the root of this loss we must return for a moment to the first couple standing naked and unashamed in the garden. In this pre-Fall moment there was no possibility of self-definition that did not include being in right relationship with others. To know oneself was to know oneself in true relation to God, to the other and to creation. There was no act in which the self was considered abstractly apart from others. To be human meant to be male and female together. It meant to be creatures of God in fellowship with God. It meant to be a caretaker and partaker of creation. Humanity had no basis for being apart from these relationships. Therefore the “self” was confident, at peace and whole as it participated in what gave it its definition, meaning, purpose and function. To be human was to be a steward, for the work of stewardship was the natural result of these relationships. The self-understanding of the first couple was expressed not only by who they were but also by what they did. They were stewards in relation to all around them. Their command was to be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth. Their command was to have dominion and care for the earth just as God had already modeled dominion and care for them and all creation. Being stewards and following these commands were part of their self-understanding. In our original created state, being and doing were enmeshed. The Fall cost the first couple this sense of self-identity.

If we can no longer define ourselves by our relationships because of their brokenness, we must define ourselves according to some other criteria—an inevitably foreign and counterfeit criteria. The rise of the autonomous self and the search for independent self-understanding and meaning has forged a different standard for self-definition, and therefore an alternate set of criteria

to measure meaning and purpose. What are the standards you use to measure your success? How are these standards affected by how you are seen by your neighbor, your spouse, your kids, your boss? We all establish certain measures of our self-value and our ultimate worth. What are yours? It should not be surprising that these criteria are rife with the deception that has come with our fallenness at every relational level. They come wrapped in terms of power, dominance, personal happiness, self-actualization and self-gratification. They have become the prize that many will sell their souls to gain. They are the end used to justify almost any means, even if hurtful, exploitative, devious or perverse. In dismissing our original purpose-God's criteria--we must replace it with another.

Our loss of self-definition does not nullify the fact that we are still the beloved creatures of God. That ultimate self-definition will never be lost as long as God is the God of the covenant.

The other side of this problem is the choice we make to replace that loss of self-definition with alien definitions. The enemy will always be more than glad to offer sumptuous substitutes for our self-definition as children in the kingdom of the triune God of grace. It began in Eden with "I am an individual man, and "I am an individual woman."

These new definitions were twisted substitutes for "I am man with woman, and "I am woman with man." We have a seemingly limitless array of self-definitions. Whether they are formed from natural traits, behaviors, social circumstances, achievements or patterns of reinforcement from others, they always stand on very shaky ground. In every case, if they are in denial or

defiance of God's definition of us, they are innately deceptive and can work only for our destruction.

Whatever attributes currently make up our self-perception, our work as steward leaders depends on submission of those attributes to the redemptive and transformative authority and lordship of the great definition given to us in the covenant established for us by the triune God before the creation of the world and brought to fulfillment for us in Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. We are first God's children-children in the kingdom of the triune God of grace.

We must be caretakers of our self-definition so that we do not allow foreign perceptions to distort our self-understanding as children of God. We can do that only by the working of the Holy Spirit and in full knowledge of what was done for us in the work of Jesus Christ.

- **Why is a proper understanding of who we were created to be important?**
- **How can our roles in leadership interfere in, or replace our relationship with God?**
- **Is there a connection between corruption and the search for meaning and purpose in people's lives?**